

TURNER STATION COMMUNITY CONSERVATION PLAN

History of Turner Station

Turner Station has changed little since the end of its boom in the 1950's. As a result, the predominately African American community exists today much as it did twenty years ago. In some respects, the effects of time standing still are positive. The community remains closely knit. The area that grew into Turner Station was once only farmland. This tract of land was owned by J.M. Turner as early as 1877. The rural character of the area began to change in the 1880's when Pittsburgh Steel Company decided to build a steel plant on land known as Sparrows Point, which was located across Bear Creek from Turner's tract of land. The Pittsburgh Steel plant only operated at Sparrows Point for a short time before it was bought out by the Maryland Steel Company. It was also around 1888 that Mr. Turner sold a portion of his tract to the Sparrow Point Railroad Company for \$2000. The railroad company erected a station, naming it for the Turner property through which the rail passed on its way to Sparrows Point.

The Maryland Steel Company created a subsidiary called the Dundalk Company for the purpose of overseeing construction of housing for workers in nearby Dundalk. The Dundalk Company had just started constructing homes and a shopping center when World War I created an astonishing demand for ships constructed of steel. As a result of this increased demand for labor, many African Americans migrated to the area and created their own communities with barber shops, fraternal organizations, restaurants, and churches.

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The Balnew Cab Company was a thriving community owned business in the 1940's and 50's.



The Turner Homes School opened in the 1930's.

Picturesque housing for white steelworkers, being built by the Dundalk Company was already under construction in nearby Dundalk. Development also included schools, churches and one of the first planned shopping centers in the country. Meanwhile, the housing for African American Steelworkers progressed at a much slower rate. The first housing developments outside of Dundalk were Steelton Park and Carnegie Platt. In 1920, a school was built and was called Turner School. It served only the African American children in the community.

As housing sprung up around the Turner Station stop of the Sparrows Point Railroad, the Turner Station community took form. Characteristic of many other African American communities in the 1930's, the residents of Turner Station were self sufficient. Since segregation discouraged their business outside of their immediate community, they opened their community-based businesses such as Balnew Cab Company, Allmond's Confectionery, the Anthony Theatre, and Fanny Major's Community Laundry. The Adams Cocktail Lounge located on Main Street was considered the most popular black lounge in Baltimore County, hosting entertainment greats such as Chick Webb, Cab Calloway, Pearl Bailey and Billy Eckstein.

Many famous and innovative individuals such as Dr. Anthony Thomas and Henrietta Lacks were originally from Turner Station. While many extraordinary residents like these were making contributions to the community and even the world, Turner Station had reached its high point. The first residents of the community had set a foundation of homes, businesses and religious institutions, World War II created another need for steel and additional workers at the Bethlehem Steel Plant. As a result, two large housing complexes were constructed in the 1940's in Turner Station. Day Village, originally

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contained 500 two bedroom, two story rental units. Ernest Lyon Homes contained 300 one and two story units. There was also a cluster of rowhouses located at the north end of Turner Station which were built during World War II.

In addition, the community also developed its own schools-Turner Elementary School, Fleming School, and Sollers Point High School. These schools were staffed with dedicated teachers and administrators. As a result of the dedication, demands for excellence and close ties with the families of Turner Station, the educators at these schools were able to ensure that the students had a strong educational foundation.

After the 1950's very little residential or commercial development occurred. In fact, after World War II, the community began to decline. As with many older areas, limited job possibilities and housing choices forced children of long time residents to look to the suburbs. Between 1950 and 1970, the population of Turner Station declined by nearly fifty percent.

The population decline had many adverse effects on the community. Vacant apartments and rowhouses were bought by persons not living within the community and inhabited by a more transient population. Problems such as drug abuse, crime and deteriorated properties became common. Vacant and boarded properties were a common sight in the Lyons Homes and Day Village communities.

At the turn of the 21st century, things are starting to turn around in Turner Station. Within the past few years, encouraging signs of redevelopment have occurred. The opening of the Fleming Center provided the community with a center for recreational, educational, and civic activities. Investment in the redevelopment of Day Village has occurred. Most



The Adams Cocktail Lounge was a destination for many famous performers such as Pearl Bailey.



Students at Sollers Point High School in 1951.

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"Turner Station History Day" is celebrated by neighborhood youth.

importantly, the community itself has been infused with a new sense of hope and pride. It is through a partnership of concerned and dedicated community stakeholders that a neighborhood revitalization is beginning to take shape.



A community gathering in the 1940's.